Council Report
Report of the Executive Head of Governance
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Petition from Effingham residents regarding the Mole Valley Green Belt Review

Recommendation to Council:

The Council is asked to debate the subject matter of a petition and to indicate to the petition organiser what action it intends to take.

Reason for Recommendation:
To comply with the requirements of the Council’s adopted Petition Scheme.

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the receipt on 6 January 2014 of a petition signed by 325 people calling on the Council:

“to recognise the wishes of Effingham residents of maintaining the Green Belt between Effingham and Bookham when Guildford Borough Council is consulted on the Mole Valley Green Belt review.”

1.2 An identical e-petition on the Council’s website containing a further 243 e-signatories has also been received, taking the total number of signatures to 568, thus exceeding the 400 threshold for a debate on the petition at a full Council meeting.

1.3 The petition organiser’s supporting statement reads as follows:

“Mole Valley is undertaking a Metropolitan Green Belt review, which could move the boundaries and protection of the existing Green Belt to allow new housing development to take place. The Bookham review has been delegated to a local forum, Bookham Vanguard, and it impacts..."
Effingham residents as it could close the strategic gap between our villages and result in the loss of existing green space and wildlife habitat.

As Effingham residents, we believe it is important to protect this area of Green Belt and maintain a strategic gap between Bookham and Effingham.

We are strongly against any proposals that would result in closing or diminishing the existing gap and call on Guildford Borough Council to recognise the wishes of Effingham residents when the council is consulted on the Mole Valley Green Belt review”.

1.4 Under the terms of our adopted petition scheme, the Council is invited to consider and respond to the petition.

2. Strategic Priorities

2.1 Formal consideration by the full Council of proposals contained in a petition is consistent with the Council’s desire to be open and accountable to its residents and to deliver improvements and enable change across the Borough.

3. Background to subject matter of petition

3.1 In line with the National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 83, Mole Valley District Council are undertaking a review of the Green Belt within their administrative area. Paragraph 83 states that local authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the Plan period.

3.2 As a neighbouring council, Mole Valley are under an obligation to consult on strategic planning matters that cross administrative boundaries due to the Duty to Cooperate recently introduced. As part of that process, Guildford Borough Council has been officially requested to respond to the current consultation being run by Mole Valley DC on this matter. Any response will be endorsed by the Lead Councillor for Planning and Governance before it is sent to Mole Valley.

3.3 As part of the process in discharging the Duty to Co-operate, the Head of Planning Services will be meeting with the Head of Planning Policy at Mole Valley to discuss this issue.

3.4 It is open for the residents of Effingham to respond directly to the consultation that is currently being carried out by Mole Valley. It would be premature at this stage in the Local Plan process to state what our approach to the review of Green Belt boundaries might be, and certainly premature in advance of the Head of Planning Services meeting with Mole Valley to discuss this and related matters.

4. The Council’s Petition Scheme

4.1 The Council’s adopted petition scheme provides that where a petition contains more than 400 signatures in relation to an issue that affects a single ward, or 500 signatures in relation to an issue affecting two or more wards, it
will be referred to the full Council for debate. The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at the meeting.

4.2 The petition scheme states that our response will depend on what a petition asks for, but may include one or more of the following:

- taking the action requested in the petition
- considering the petition at a meeting of the Council or Executive
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a meeting with petitioners or the petition organiser
- undertaking research into the matter
- writing to the petition organiser setting out the Council’s views about the request in the petition
- referring the petition to one of the Council’s scrutiny committees for consideration

Procedure for dealing with the petition at the meeting

4.3 Under the Council’s petition scheme, the petition organiser is given a period of up to five minutes to speak to the subject matter of the petition at the meeting. Councillors will have an opportunity to ask questions of the petition organiser before the formal debate on the petition.

4.4 In accordance with the rules of debate in Council Procedure Rule 11 (a), at the start of the debate, a motion as to how the Council should respond to the petition should be moved formally and seconded in the usual way. Any such motion may be subject to amendment. After the debate and before a final decision or vote is taken on the Council’s response to the petition, the petition organiser will be granted a right of reply for a further period of up to five minutes.

4.5 Councillors’ comments during the debate shall not exceed five minutes in length.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 None

6. Legal Implications

6.1 Section 109 of the Localism Act 2011 sets out the mechanics for the abolition of Regional Spatial Planning in an effort to re-empower local planning authorities in controlling development in their own areas. However, in recognition that many issues cross the boundaries between neighbouring authorities, for instance (topically) flood risk management, by s.110 it also introduced a positive Duty to Co-operate with them as s.33(A) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 in matters of planning policy.

6.3 This petition concerns a matter of immediate concern to a neighbouring authority, and as such, this Council has no power to take its decisions, but only to influence them. The Council can pass on its views as a statutory consultee, and must co-operate with Mole Valley District Council as explained above. The petitioner’s concerns should be communicated directly to Mole Valley District Council, as it is too early in the plan-making process for Guildford Borough Council to have formulated its own views on the issue of the permanence of its own Green Belt boundaries.

7. **Human Resource Implications**

7.1 None

8. **Background papers**

Adopted Petition Scheme (June 2010)

9. **Appendices**

None